

What Training Do You Offer Your Fundraisers?

The question “What training do you offer your fundraisers to make them more effective at the sales side of the nonprofit world?” was posted by a member of the our [Nonprofit Executive Director/CEO LinkedIn](#) group. Below we share selected answers from the group, which provide advice and consider the difference between fundraising and sales.

Bryan, CEO

I think as nonprofit leaders, we need to think of our nonprofits more like a business. For example, instead of having a development director, we have a marketing director. I do most of our fundraising, for better or for worse, but if I were to hire a fundraiser I may look to hire a sales person. However, I'd ensure that sales person was passionate about our cause and had some experience either working or volunteering in our sector.

Torrie, CEO

I think sales skills are very important for development staff and other leaders. In fact, as Dan Pink states clearly in his book *To Sell Is Human*, we are all salespeople in one form or another! In our organization we have equipped our staff by hosting book groups around Dan Pink's book, and we have had intensive training on the For Impact model from [The Suddes Group](#). One of their mantras of social entrepreneurship is “You are in sales. Get over it.”

Joan, Nonprofit Consultant

I'm bristling at the use of the word “sales.” I came from corporate America and I know from “sales.” That is not what fundraising is. At all. Fundraising is an offer to join a community of people engaged around an important mission of cause. I have a client who spoke only about revenue and sales and not about the real motivation to give. It's emotional. It's about storytelling. (See [Bridgespan.org's “Why Nonprofits Need to be Storytellers”](#) by Andy Goodman for more on this topic.)

Deirdre, ED

I share some of Joan's sensitivity having come to the nonprofit arena as a "recovering" entrepreneur. We are also sharing the story of the value-add our work provides to the individuals we serve and to the communities we share.

Linda, Principal and CEO

While I understand some people are sensitive to the word "sales," think about it... "Selling" is about building relationships, understanding the needs of the "buyer" and recommending a "product" that will satisfy those needs. "Fundraising" is about building relationships, understanding the needs of the "donor," and recommending a "project" that will satisfy those needs. Not sure there is such a big difference. While we are certainly not "selling" copiers, we are "selling" being part of a better world through someone's "contribution" vs. "purchase."

One of the biggest challenges I've seen with fundraisers is because the best ones are so relationship oriented, they frequently struggle to be able to demonstrate how their activity is leading to results. Be sure they understand your expectations on the reporting side, in addition to the end result side.

Steve, ED

Sales and fundraising are similar skill sets meant to match people and products/causes. ...The difference is in motivation—what drives the effort. Get the money at any cost, for the sake of the money, leads to unethical practices in both sales and fundraising. That being said, I find that successful professional salespeople bring a discipline and attitude to the business of fundraising that benefits the organization and is appreciated and recognized by donors. I have not done much with sending fundraisers to sales training but have seen great results with recruiting professional salespeople and coaching them in fundraising. They have no issue with high expectations, measurable outcomes, and appreciate a culture that actually thinks people are more important than money.

What advice would you offer about fundraising? Join the conversation on [LinkedIn](#) or start your own using the Comment area on this article on [Bridgespan.org](#).

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